DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY E Schaufler DATE 7/2/85
RDS [ ] or XDS [ ]
TS AUTH
EXT

R duplicate C

F-15
A6JF

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

S/S

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

TO: T - Mr. Buckley

FROM: NEA - Nicholas A. Veliotes

SUBJECT: Briefing Materials for F-15 Enhancement Presentation

Attached are talking points and an unclassified background paper on the stability of Saudi Arabia which you requested for use in Congressional and public discussions of the AWACS package. You may wish to send these talking points and this background paper to Richard Allen.

Attachments:

1. Talking points

2. Background paper

Drafted: NEA/ARP: RBMerrick
7/9/81:x20865

Clearances: NEA/ARP:RHPelletreau
NEA:JWTwinam

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

TALKING POINTS

-- SAUDI ARABIA IS ONE OF THE MOST STABLE ARAB STATES.

-- CONCERN ABOUT SAUDI STABILITY IS MORE A REFLECTION OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF SAUDI ARABIA TO THE UNITED STATES AND THE WEST RATHER THAN ANY DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE KINGDOM.

-- THE SAUDI ROYAL FAMILY HAS DEMONSTRATED SKILL AND ADAPTABILITY IN COPING WITH SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE AND POLITICAL TURMOIL AND ARMED CONFLICT IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES.

-- THE REGIME ENJOYS STRONG LEGITIMACY AND HAS CAREFULLY PRESERVED ITS TRIBAL AND RELIGIOUS BASES.

-- BECAUSE OF THE ENORMOUS FLOW OF OIL WEALTH, THE REGIME HAS PROVIDED BROAD SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS WITHOUT DOMESTIC TAXATION.

-- THE PERCEPTION OF SAUDI DEDICATION TO ARAB CAUSES REMAINS THE MOST CRITICAL FACTOR FOR POLITICAL STABILITY, AND THE LEADERSHIP HAS CAREFULLY PURSUED POLICIES WHICH REFLECT KEEN RECOGNITION OF THIS FACT.

-- COHESION IS THE PILLAR OF STRENGTH IN THE ROYAL FAMILY AND SUCCESSION SEEMS FIRMLY SETTLED.

-- FOR OVER A DECADE THERE HAS BEEN NO EVIDENCE OF ANTI-REGIME SENTIMENT IN THE MILITARY AND THE ROYAL FAMILY PURSUES SUBSTANTIAL PROGRAMS AND POLICIES TO MAINTAIN THEIR LOYALTY.

-- THE REGIME CONTINUES WITH THE DELICATE TASK OF RECONCILING POPULAR DEMAND FOR PROGRESS WITH PRESERVATION OF THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION OF A DEEPLY CONSERVATIVE SOCIETY. A SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONSENSUS CONTINUES BOTH ON ACQUIRING

TECHNOLOGY AND IN SHADING ITS EFFECTS TO FIT THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF THE SAUDI STATE.

-- POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS ARE EVOLVING. WHILE THERE IS NO WIDESPREAD PRESSURE FOR DRASTIC POLITICAL CHANGE, IN TIME THE NEW GENERATION OF HIGHLY EDUCATED SAUDIS PROBABLY WILL SEEK BETTER ACCESS TO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. THE GOVERNMENT ALREADY HAS BEGUN TO ADDRESS THIS PROBLEM.

-- THE SMALL, GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED, SHIA COMMUNITY POSES NO SERIOUS POLITICAL THREAT TO THE REGIME.

-- THE REGIME IS ACUTELY AWARE OF POTENTIAL PROBLEMS FROM THE HEAVY PRESENCE OF FOREIGNERS IN THE SAUDI WORK FORCE. THE PROBLEM, HOWEVER, IS MANAGEABLE.

-- THUS FAR, THE REGIME HAS SUCCEEDED IN PREVENTING SIGNIFICANT ALIENATION BY EITHER MODERN OR TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS OF THE SOCIETY. IT HAS BEEN EXTREMELY CAREFUL TO CONDUCT ITS FOREIGN POLICY IN A WAY THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE ARAB NATIONALIST ASPIRATIONS OF ITS OWN PEOPLE.

-- THE U.S./SAUDI RELATIONSHIP HAS AN IMPORTANT BEARING ON SAUDI SECURITY. THE SAUDIS HAVE AND WILL CONTINUE TO RESIST ASPECTS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES WHICH, IF TAKEN TOO FAR, WILL CREATE INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS. AT THE SAME TIME, U.S. SUPPORT FOR SAUDI ARABIA AND THE DOMESTIC AND INTER-ARAB PERCEPTION OF THAT SUPPORT ARE AN IMPORTANT BUTTRESS TO STABILITY.

-- THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT EVIDENCE OF THE TYPES OF DISSENSION OR ORGANIZED OPPOSITION WHICH HAVE PRECEDED REVOLUTION OR SERIOUS INTERNAL INSTABILITY IN OTHER MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES.

STABILITY OF SAUDI ARABIA

Many informed Western analysts on balance consider Saudi Arabia one of the most stable Arab states. Nonetheless, Western observers find it difficult to understand fully the dynamics of the peculiar Saudi society and tend to question whether the traditional Saudi regime can long survive rapid economic and social change. Revolutions elsewhere in the Middle East -- Nasser's through Khomeini's -- periodically have intensified this concern, which also reflects recognition of the greatly increased importance of Saudi Arabia to the United States and the West over the last decade.

Yet for over half a century the Saudi Royal Family has demonstrated skill and adaptability in coping with the tensions of truly revolutionary social and economic change at home and political turmoil and armed conflict in neighboring countries.

ELEMENTS OF STRENGTH

The Saudi regime enjoys a strong tradition of legitimacy among the tribal elements of central Arabia, which have looked to it for leadership for over two centuries. This tribal basis of power has been for over 200 years reinforced by the Ruling Family's close association with the Islamic reformist movement founded by Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab, which remains the driving force of religious life in the extremely conservative Saudi society. The Ruling Family has carefully preserved its tribal and religious bases and remains in close consultation with the country's tribal and religious leaders.

Through the unification of Arabia into the present Kingdom, the prestige and legitimacy of the Ruling Family have been enhanced as the force for bringing peace and order to a chronically turbulent region and as the founder of the modern Kingdom with which the Saudi people have demonstrated a growing sense of national identity.

While the Saudi regime is frequently stereotyped in the West as deeply conservative, it has, in the experience of its own people, been the modernizing force which has brought the benefits of technology, health and education to a once extremely backward and impoverished society. Because of the enormous flow of oil wealth, the regime has been able to distribute social and economic benefits on a broad scale without placing the burden of taxation on its own people.

The regime's prestige at home has been enhanced by Saudi Arabia's role in the Islamic world as the keeper of the holy places of Mecca and Medina. Over the last decade in particular the Saudi regime has enhanced its prestige in the Arab world, having moved from being on the defensive against revolutionary

Arab movements to assuming an initiative taking role in relieving Arab tensions and catalyzing Arab consensus. The perception both at home and in the wider Arab world of the regime's dedication to Arab causes remains the most critical factor in the prospects for political stability in Saudi Arabia, and the leadership has carefully pursued policies which reflect keen recognition of this fact.

A second critical factor to the Ruling Family's survival is its cohesion. The large size of the Saud family -- which permeates every significant aspect of the society and remains in close contact with all key elements -- is itself a source of strength. The family leadership has consistently displayed -- including at times of crisis such as the removal of King Saud and the assassination of King Faisal -- a talent for carefully building family consensus and maintaining essential family unity. While there are inevitable tensions within so large a Ruling Family -- including jockeying for position and power and disagreements on specific policies and issues -- there are no signs of factionalism along ideological or policy lines. The dominant and instinctive political theme in the Ruling Family appears to be recognition that its unity is essential for its survival. The succession from the present King to Crown Prince Fahd seems firmly set as is the prospect that Prince Abdallah will replace Fahd as heir apparent.

In Saudi Arabia, as elsewhere in the Middle East, the loyalty of the military must be viewed as critical to the regime's survival. (For over a decade there has been no evidence of anti-regime sentiment in the military.) The Saudi leadership devotes great priority and substantial resources to the welfare and development of the military establishment, including the National Guard, which has the primary responsibility for internal security, is organized on tribal lines and has traditionally been considered as a balance to the regular army. The military officer corps broadly reflects the main elements of what remains essentially a tribal and family society in which the Ruling Family has strong and numerous roots. Members of the Ruling Family occupy key positions in the armed forces.

ELEMENTS OF POTENTIAL INSTABILITY

The regime continues to be faced, as it has been for half a century, with the delicate task of reconciling popular demands for progress with the need to preserve the social and religious foundation of a deeply conservative society. Important elements of Saudi society believe that social, economic and political progress is too rapid and have historically brought pressure on the regime to restrain social change. Yet it is doubtful that any major segment of Saudi society today would choose to foresake the technological and educational advantages now

beginning to be made available on a massive scale. A social and religious consensus continues to exist in Saudi Arabia both on acquiring technology and in shading its effects to fit the religious foundations of the Saudi state.

An aspect of the struggle between progress and tradition involves political institutions. Saudi political institutions have evolved through the traditional structures of family, clan and tribe, with direct recourse to the King's majlis if these avenues proved insufficient to satisfy individual needs or grievances. While these institutions continue to function in a reasonably effective manner and with a large degree of popular consent, they are becoming increasingly strained as the population grows and the economy becomes more complex. Although there is today no intense widespread pressure for drastic political change, in time the new generation of highly educated Saudis will in all probability seek better access to the decision-making process. The government has already begun to address this problem and is studying proposals for a consultative assembly and a new system of local government.

Conspicuous consumption, high spending life styles and corrupt business practices on the part of some prominent Saudis could in a time of social or political stress become a rallying cry against the regime. The government is aware of the potential harm caused by flagrant contracting abuses and has tightened regulations on agents' fees and begun making greater use of public tenders. It has also discouraged the spending spree image among Saudis travelling abroad. The rigid code of personal conduct, based on traditional and religious values, which prevails in the Kingdom and includes the banning of alcohol, pornography, gambling and night clubs, preserves the image of fundamentalist purity and seems to be consistent with the prevailing attitudes of the Saudi society.

The Shia community, less than 200,000 and concentrated in the Eastern Province, does not pose a serious political threat to the regime. Its attitudes, however, are important to industrial security because of the large number of Shia workers in the petroleum industry. In 1979, at the height of the Iranian revolution and of Iranian efforts to agitate the Saudi Shia, there were serious demonstrations in the Shia community. The government dealt firmly with the demonstrators and subsequently has devoted increased attention and resources to meeting the Shia community's economic demands. There have been no further significant disturbances.

In the long term the heavy presence of foreigners in the Saudi work force raises question of social stability. The regime is acutely aware of these problems and has long demonstrated readiness to take security measures to deal with any

threat to order posed by expatriate grievances. Large segments of the foreign community--Americans, Europeans, and non-Moslem Asians--are seperated from the Saudi society by religion, culture and language. They, along with the Pakistanis and other non-Arab Muslims, show little tendency to develop roots in Saudi Arabia; their motives for being there are monetary and their attitudes are apolitical. The significant Arab foreign groups--Palestinians, Egyptians, and Yemenis--play an important role in the Saudi economy but the government has long exercised great care to prevent or minimize their political impact.

To date the Saudi regime seems to have succeeded in preventing significant alienation on the part of either the modern or traditional elements of the society. The energies of the increasing number of educated Saudis seem to have found ample outlet in the challenges of development facing both the private and public sectors. The regime remains extremely sensitive, however, to the well-demonstrated political volitility of Arab societies caught up in nationalist concepts. It has been extremely careful to conduct its foreign policy in a way that is consistent with the Arab nationalist aspirations of its own people.

Finally, the US-Saudi relationship has an important bearing on Saudi security in several respects. First, the Saudis have resisted and will continue to resist aspects of their relationship with the United States which if taken too far would create internal problems with their own people. At the same time, however, the concept of US support for Saudi Arabia and the perception that the US and Saudi Arabia enjoy a special relationship are an important buttress to the stability of the Kingdom. Any indication of a withdrawal or weakening of that support would embarrass and weaken the regime both internally and within the Arab world.

THE OBJECTIVE TEST

The long term prospects for stability will continue to be of concern to the Saudi leadership and to outsiders with major interests in Saudi Arabia, and the factors which impact on those prospects will undoubtedly remain subject of debate. The present fact, however, is that there is no significant evidence of the types of dissension or organized opposition which have normally preceded revolutionary situations or serious internal instability in other Middle Eastern Countries.